

Stennis, (Sen.) John

RICHARD WILSON

U.S. Not Winning in Vietnam, Stennis Says

TV spoofed Senator John Stennis of Mississippi by persuading him to try on in front of the camera a green beret of the Army Special Forces; newspapers blared, "Stennis demands more bombing." So now let us see what were the conclusions of the chairman of the Senate Preparedness subcommittee whose previous estimates and calculations on the Vietnam war deserved more attention than they got.

Stennis returned from his latest trip to Vietnam with two major conclusions on the progress of the war:

1. Enemy forces have increased very substantially in the last year, notwithstanding reported heavy casualties, and there is every indication that the Communists have no intention of abandoning the fight or seeking peace through negotiations—bombing pause or no bombing pause, U Thant or no U Thant.

2. The concentration of anti-aircraft fire over North Vietnam is greater than in any war in history and continues to increase. U.S. aircraft and pilot losses are high and compound existing shortages of both aircraft and pilots.

Consequently, we are not winning the war in Vietnam; we are not pacifying Vietnam; we have no long-term plan for either winning or pacifying.

This is not encouraging. It does not comport with the official line that we are proceeding slowly, painfully but

surely, to a satisfactory termination of the fighting because the Communists will wear out before we do.

Stennis' estimates on the cost of the war have been more reliable than Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara's. Stennis says the new estimate of \$9 billion to \$10 billion additional cost is low. Other sources say the increase will be nearer \$14 billion.

There are two ways of looking at Stennis's findings. One is that the cost of the war has already been too great, it cannot be won at acceptable costs, and it is imperative that we should admit a mistake, pull back to our main Pacific bases, including those in Vietnam and Thailand, and let the Communists take over South Vietnam if they can do so and will give guarantees as to the safety of South Vietnam's population.

This might be conceivable if it were practicable. But it is not practicable to believe that North Vietnam will accept a negotiated settlement containing the two most important parts of the foregoing formula—guarantees of the political integrity and safety of the population of South Vietnam safeguarded by the presence of American protective forces.

The minimum Communist terms have been the withdrawal of American forces with no guarantees of the safety or political integrity and right-to-choose of the people of South Vietnam.

Another way to look at Vietnam is to consider more carefully what Stennis is talking about. He is not talking about blowing North Vietnam off the map. He advocates striking all significant military targets in North Vietnam—and there are plenty of them to strike, instead of some of the piddling targets that pilots can barely see in the jungles. He proposes to close the port of Haiphong. That is a direct act against the Russians, who have already taken direct acts against U.S. forces.

Stennis proposes a definite policy to win the war, with the U.S. public informed of what that means. He says that we should put aside major segments of the Great Society program and the war on poverty and concentrate our efforts on winning the war in Vietnam.

If there is no break in the war, a year from now there may be nearly 100,000 more troops from the north sent into South Vietnam; a year from now, if the present build-up in anti-aircraft defenses continues, American air losses will mount very much higher.

President Johnson is thus being forced toward the decision he does not like: Either a definite policy of winning the war or a policy of slowly liquidating it. The war, if Stennis's analysis now is as accurate as those in the past, cannot go on as it is and lead toward an acceptable outcome.

Nor can Johnson confidently go into the next presidential election less than two years away in a war that by that time will have spanned seven years since the first American soldier was killed.